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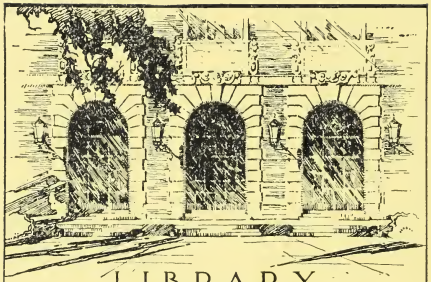

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AUGUSTE RODIN

WITH LIST OF HIS PRINCIPAL WORKS

BY

RUDOLF DIRCKS

Author of

"VERISIMILITUDES,"
"THE LIBRETTO," ETC.

A. SIEGLE
2 LANGHAM PLACE, LONDON, W.
1904

To

W. H. D.

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The author wishes to express his sense of indebtedness to M. Rodin for the courtesy with which M. Rodin received him at his studios in Paris and at Meudon, and for his frank and cordial expression of his ideas in regard to the art of sculpture

ILLUSTRATIONS

PORTRAIT OF AUGUSTE RODIN (*Photogravure*)	*Frontispiece*
THE THINKER (*Musée Rodin at Meudon*)	*Facing page* 8
THE MAN WITH THE BROKEN NOSE (*Musée Rodin at Meudon*)	12
THE AGE OF BRONZE (*Musée du Luxembourg*)	18
ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST (*Musée du Luxembourg*)	24
"LA PENSÉE" (*Musée du Luxembourg*)	30
THE DANAIDE (*Musée du Luxembourg*)	36
BUST OF JEAN PAUL LAURENS (*Musée du Luxembourg*)	44
THE KISS (*Musée du Luxembourg*)	46
THE BURGESSES OF CALAIS (*Photogravure*) (*Place de la Poste, Calais*)	52
BALZAC (*Musée Rodin at Meudon*)	60
A SKETCH FROM THE MODEL	67
POLYPHEMUS (*Musée du Luxembourg*)	70

CONTENTS

Introductory—Rodin and the Modern Movement—Compared with the antique—His view of Nature—Æsthetics of sculpture . . . Pp. 1–10

I

The art instinct—Rodin's early training—"La Petite École de Dessin"—The Man with the Broken Nose—The Siege of Paris—Brussels—Visit to Italy—"The Age of Bronze" . . Pp. 11–20

II

Combination of artistic and philosophic spirit—Life at Brussels—Accepted at the Salon—Charge of casting from life—M. Turquet appointed Under-Secretary for Fine Arts . . . . . Pp. 21–26

III

Renaissance and Gothic sculpture—"St. John the Baptist"—Rodin's eclecticism—His view of Nature Pp. 27–34

CONTENTS

IV

At Sèvres—"La Défense Nationale"—Commission for "La Porte de l'Enfer"—Its origin—Description—Dante and Baudelaire . . . Pp. 35–42

V

"The Three Phantoms"—"The Thinker"—Portraiture—Antagonism to his work—The Artist and the State—"Le Baiser" . . . Pp. 43–48

VI

Monument of Claude Gellée—The Burgesses of Calais—Froissart's "Chronicles"—The position of the monument . . . . . Pp. 49–57

VII

Monument of Victor Hugo—The Balzac—Lamartine's description—The "Société des Gens de Lettres"—Rejection of the statue . . . Pp. 58–65

VIII

Dry-points and sketches—Rodin's symbolism—"Monument du Travail"—Reception in England—Revival of interest in sculpture . . . Pp. 66–70

List of M. Rodin's Principal Works Pp. 71–72

AUGUSTE RODIN

DURING the latter half of the nineteenth century the creative forces in various kinds of art, in literature, music, and sculpture, found an expression which did not quite fall in with any of the existing categories.

Tolstoy in fiction, Ibsen in drama, Walt Whitman in poetry, and Wagner in music—to take only the greatest names—brought into art a new spirit, and, in some respects, a new form. To the same type of creative force must now be added the name of Rodin. The tendency of the work of these various artists was to lift art out of a certain parochialism, to give it an intellectual impetus, and to bring within its influence, not only those who cared about art, but also those who cared about life in its more profound aspects, or about philosophy.

In idea it was art after what one calls *the grand*

manner; it extended its influence in all directions, and it provoked discussion, as the profound affairs of life provoke discussion. It forced itself to be taken seriously. It was not a type that captivates and charms; it was not sensuous; it appealed to the emotions through the intellect; and it was fastidious only in its penetration, in its breadth, and in its insistence on the relation of man to the universal scheme of things.

When Ibsen takes the affairs of a small Norwegian town as the subject for a play, the work turns out to be a microcosm; and when Tolstoy portrays the perfectly idiosyncratic and Slavonic types of *Anna Karenin* and *Levin*, he portrays also the universal types of man and woman, not only in relation to their immediate surroundings, to small manners, but in relation to the formidable questions which mankind and womankind are for ever putting to themselves. This intimate, questioning spirit, this subjective appeal, concerned with the spiritual phases of life, accounts not a little, no doubt, for the distaste which this kind of literature has occasioned, and may still occasion, in many quarters.

Rodin represents an analogous temper in the art of sculpture. As with those others, his work carries

the mind beyond the object actually represented. It is curiously metaphysical; and it is as sincerely the outcome of the conditions and thought of modern life as the sculpture of the ancients was of the life of Greece. The kind of thought which finds expression in his work is entirely opposed to what one calls Hellenic serenity. But the spirit of the Greeks can only be approached to-day in a spirit of scholarship and detachment. Greek sculpture, it has been said, was the finest expression of Greek life; a sensuous, open-air, well ordered life, largely spent between the gymnasia and the temple. In their love and care of the human body they created an image of man more perfect than man himself; and this applies not only to the figures of Olympian divinities, but to the athletes, for the *Discobolus* and *Apoxyomenus* are not less perfect figures than the *Apollo* and *Hermes*.

All the skill and adaptability of their art was for a considerable period devoted to the human frame alone, the head, the cast of the features, being largely a convention. In the course of time a perfect head was evolved for this perfect body, and the serene and beautiful features, with their touch of sadness, possess subtleties which perhaps we

can no longer adequately apprehend,—the expression of which was modified no doubt by the athletic life, which then, as now, would have taken a visible sign of extreme emotion as a sign of weakness. The sculptors of Greece were faithful interpreters of the feeling and thought of their time ; and rather by working in their interpretative spirit, than by imitation of the works of a past and golden age, may a modern sculptor hope to provide a distant analogy between himself and the ancients.

In this respect if in no other Rodin may be said to possess the classic spirit ; he reflects in his work the complex temper of his age more completely than any other living sculptor. And, in so far as the conditions of modern life are almost dramatically opposed to the conditions of Greek life does his art too diverge from that of the antique. In the turmoil and competition of commerce, in the impetuous advance of science, in the quickened means of mental communication, in the strenuous cultivation of knowledge, in all this curiosity, thirst, and restlessness of the life of the last hundred years, the nature of man has not remained stationary. Science has scarcely added to the simplicity of either thought or emotion by discounting explanations which had

hitherto been largely satisfying to both, and by confronting man afresh with the problem of his own being. In all this mental conflict, in this turbulence of feeling, art has found expression which cannot be grouped under the older formulas of classic or romantic or realistic. It is no longer the expression of a controlled and sustained wisdom as was Greek art; nor of a splendid and irresistible vitality, tempered by religious feeling, as was the art of the Italian Renaissance. It is introspective, experimental, neurotic.

Rodin is a manifestation of this spirit in art. Simple-minded and strenuous, he moves in a world of abstract ideas, in a world of mystery and exaltation, with a singular lack of self-consciousness. A writer has said that Rodin talks about art as a farmer talks about crops. And these abstractions,—the neurotic images of a Baudelaire, the horrors of the *Inferno*, the soul of a Victor Hugo, or a Balzac, or a Rochefort, or a Peruvian beauty,—are to him as much the affairs of his daily life and thought as corn and pasture are to a farmer. He talks incessantly of Nature, of its secrets, of its beauty, as containing the whole problem, in art, that really matters. He does not approach Nature with preconceived ideas.

He does not wish to pose or arrange it; for it has it own poses, its own arrangement, which are sufficient in themselves. "*La Nature*," he tells us, "*se compose elle-même*."

He chooses, as it is said that Lysippus chose, that Nature should be his instructor. "Nature," Rodin has said, "is ever full of fine form, of design; yet so many pass by and see nothing, and copy old things, or work in preconceived notions of Nature; and all the while Nature is there, full of delightful new forms, in the stalk of a flower, in a bud, in a human limb, in a passing action in the street." * Again, he says, with regard to his method of working: "*J'observe longuement mon modèle, je ne lui demande pas de pose cherchée, je le laisse libre d'aller et venir dans l'atelier comme un cheval échappé, et je transcris les observations que je fais. C'est par cette étude patiente que j'ai retrouvé, parfois, les procédés des Grecs, grâce au travail lui-même, et non en imitant leurs statues.*" †

It will, no doubt, be necessary to return to this view of Nature in the independent consideration of his work; but it may be said here that his view is not that of the realist,—but that of the poet, the

* *Art Journal*, 1900, p. 214.

† Cladel: Auguste Rodin, p. 29.

visionary, the philosopher. Nature to him is always a concrete presentment of an abstract idea. Clay, marble, bronze, are the materials in which he thinks : his thought is entirely plastic. It is a testimony, if a minor one, to his competence in his art, that he is content for it to speak for itself, that he is indifferent to the literary accompaniment of a title. His type of work is never that of the *petite anecdote ;* its range is outside the small illustrations, the small circumstances of life. Nature speaks through him of her larger schemes. He would prefer to number his works as a composer numbers his sonatas. But to be eloquent in sculpture, he says, one must be a master of modelling ; further, it is necessary to exaggerate a little,—and it is necessary to sacrifice. He copies Nature at her moment of freedom and expression ; but to give the idea of freedom and expression it is necessary for him to use his material as an artist. This is, of course, due to the fact that art is not Nature, but a conversion of Nature ; and to give the effect of truth in art elimination and emphasis are necessary as means to an end. A painter, for instance, would not give the true effect of a tree if he painted every leaf, nor of a house if he depicted every brick.

Lessing has said that the aim of knowledge is truth, and that the aim of art is pleasure. But æsthetics have been largely formulated on the work of the Greeks. Aristotle, Plato, Winckelmann, Buffon, and many others have all assisted in giving lucidity to thought in the philosophy of fine art; but their expositions are various and often antagonistic. It may be doubted if a system of æsthetics can be adopted, in any way, as final. For, after all, æsthetics are founded on the achievements of the artist, and a fresh manifestation in art may upset philosophic calculations. Certainly, if one were now to accept Lessing's aim of art as defining its whole scope and breadth, one would have to enlarge the significance of the meaning of the word pleasure.

The words amusement and pleasure in this connection seem to us not only misleading, but responsible for a point of view which is antagonistic to a proper conception of the position of art in the general scheme of things. Art is not merely a temporary distraction from the serious affairs of life, an easy refreshment for a mind overburdened by its personal cares. It strikes deeper than that. We realise the world, a recent writer has said,

in three different ways, from the standpoint of religion, of philosophy, of art. Religion is the realisation of the aspect of things which have the highest emotional significance for us as human beings. Philosophy is the formal or diagrammatic realisation of the world ; art its impressionistic or emotional realisation. Both in philosophy and art we have to convert things into terms of the mind. Art, in its way, is as formal as philosophy : its final object is the same as philosophy. It is essentially impressionistic, and you may have an impressionistic realisation of deeper truths, just as you may have a philosophic realisation of them.

It is a corollary, noted by Mr. Brownell, that the predominance of the intellectual over the sensuous instinct is that the true should be preferred to the beautiful. One of the most suggestive statements of æsthetics is contained in Mr. Leopold Eidlitz's "Nature and Function of Art," in which he says, first (following Hegel), that art is an idea expressed in matter ; and, secondly, that beauty in art does not rest with the object represented but with the manner of its representation ; that beauty is "the measure of creative force in the abstract." Rodin holds that there is nothing ugly in Nature. There are, how-

ever, objects in Nature which would give one no pleasure to contemplate; but which, represented in art, become things of beauty. And this theory becomes of the closest interest to us in relation to much of this sculptor's work.

I

THE biography of a living person is almost necessarily an essay in impertinence. One feels, above all, in the case of an artist who gives himself to the world in his work, that the intimate facts of his life, the merely personal might be left very well to himself. But the trivial, and, largely, quite inexcusable curiosity which exists about persons with a name, has, perhaps, a definite measure of critical importance, when the name happens to be associated either with a philosophic system,—the expression of experimental thought,—or with a work of art whose influence may be as lasting as the material of which it is composed. This curiosity, which in the critic takes the form of a scientific inquiry, that investigates the accidents of influences and tendencies, has a definite, an anthropologic interest in so far as it helps to explain man to himself.

But this explanation can at best be suggestive, tentative; it can never be complete—so far as the creation of art is concerned. For behind the creation of a work of art, there hangs as great a mystery as behind the creation of the world. It is the mystery which enables man, with his short span of life, to create an image of himself which may be eloquent for centuries. In the face of great art, which is the work of man, as in the face of nature which is the work of God, man himself becomes of small account. We linger over the names of Ictinus, Pheidias, Lysippus, Homer (and we have no more than the names), because we associate them with various works of Architecture, Sculpture, or Poetry; but, if their names had been obliterated from the page of history, would the whole or the fragments of their works which have come down to us be less infinitely precious? Co-ordination and analysis, however scientific, can never ultimately explain the essential thing—the quality of the creative gift itself; but the rest, the parentage of an artist, the manner in which he lived, what he saw, all the lesser things which have gone to help him to produce what, after all, is a sort of miracle, these remain of interest. They may throw

Photo Druet *Musée Rodin*

L'HOMME AU NEZ CASSEE

(*Bronze*)

some light on the direction in which his creative power has sought expression; and in the case of a "revolutionary, protestant" spirit, like Rodin, they possess for us an interest of a very special kind.

Biographical history scarcely offers a more interesting instance of a man under the spell of the artistic instinct—dominated, that is, by the gift of expression outside himself which makes for what one calls art. Rodin's battle with circumstances was, in view of his vast productive power, unusually prolonged. But, sustained by what Professor Dowden calls a "large and wholesome sanity," the suppression of his natural gifts seems to have had the effect of storing impetus, which, when released later, projected its message with greater force and greater certainty. Rodin had arrived at middle age before he found a public, and then a public, for the most part, implacably hostile. During that long period of probation—the fifteen years which lapsed between the creation of "The Man with the Broken Nose" and the "Age of Bronze," between the ages of twenty-two and thirty-seven—Rodin seemed to be in the possession of a dual personality. There was Rodin the workman of Carrier Belleuse and others, an admirable

and strenuous craftsman by all accounts, earning the daily wage which provided shelter and food and some sort of studio for the other Rodin—the sculptor, the visionary, the poet, who in the spirit of an alchemist searching for the secrets of eternal life or eternal wealth, sought as zealously for the secret of the quality which makes for permanence in the art of sculpture. This quality he recognised as known to the sculptors of Greece, and of the Italian Renaissance. Finally, a visit to Italy and his observation of the works of Michelangelo, of Donatello, of Verocchio, and of the antique revealed to him the nature of this secret. His discovery found expression in the "Age of Bronze"; and from the time of the exhibition of that figure dates the Modern Renaissance in sculpture of which he is largely the protagonist.

Rodin, like his teacher Barye, or Houdon, is a child of the people. He was born in Paris, in November 1840. His father came from Normandy, his mother from Lorraine, and the pair were in humble circumstances. After spending part of his childhood with a relative at Beauvais, the boy Rodin returned to Paris when he was fourteen, and was sent to *La Petite École de Dessin, No. 5 Rue de l'École*

de Médecine, a school for young craftsmen, which had numbered among its students such men as Frémiet, Carpeaux, Dalou, and seems to have been a nursery for many artists who have liberated themselves from the purely academic influence. There, Mlle. Judith Cladel tells us that he copied the models of animals, of flowers, of plants, and undertook a course in modelling. He also made drawings from the antique at the Louvre. At the Bibliothèque Imperiale he was permitted to look at albums of prints after Michelangelo, Raphael, and others. His time at *la Petite École* was not spent without honour. He gained a bronze medal for drawing from the cast; and at seventeen a first bronze medal for modelling, and a second-class silver medal for drawing from the antique. But he failed in the competition for a place in drawing and modelling at the Beaux-Arts, a failure of some significance in view of his later tendencies. He also attended a class of Barye at the Museum. That sums up the whole course of his academic training.

For the rest, he was poor and had to make a living, or, at least, to contribute towards his livelihood. "He mixed plaster, cut off the mould marks

from plaster and papier-maché casts, performed the general duties of a scullion, and made occasionally a simple ornament for which he received the luxurious salary of forty cents a day." * Later, he found for himself a kind of studio in a stable, and modelling from the head of some casual vagrant, produced after eighteen months' work the mask of *The Man with a Broken Nose*. This astonishing instance of precocity, this mask which might have been the head of a dilapidated Greek poet, was rejected by the Salon of 1864, only to be accepted fourteen years later, and to win perhaps as large a share of celebrity as any work of modern sculpture. Meanwhile, Rodin was working for an ornament-maker, for a jeweller, and for himself, modelling figures, of which it is impossible to estimate the value, as he could not afford to carry the work further than the clay. He was engaged by an ornamentist to undertake work at Marseilles, and, later, by a *marchand de bons dieux*, on work at Strasbourg; but always using his leisure in the cultivation of his native and original talent. In 1863 he formed a connection with Carrier Belleuse (whose *Hébé* in the Luxembourg may be recalled), the most extensive

* Mr. Bartlett in *The American Architect*.

commercial sculptor in Paris, and in point of art rather more than that; a connection which lasted intermittently for nearly twenty years. "I was very happy," says Rodin, "to go to Belleuse, because it took me away from an ornament-maker to one who made figures."

"At my work," he says again, "I was never sad. I always had pleasure in it. My ardour was immense. I was always studying. Study embraces it all. Those who saw my things pronounced them bad. I never knew what a word of encouragement was. The little terra cotta heads and figures that I exposed in shop windows never sold. So far as the world went, I was shut out from it, nor did I know that it could be of use to me. I went to the Salon and admired the works of Perraud and other leading sculptors, and thought, as ever, that they were great masters, though in their sketches I saw that they were not strong. In looking at the hands they made, I thought them so fine that I should never be able to equal them. I was all this time working from Nature, but could not make my hands as good as theirs, and I could not understand why. But when I got my hands all right from life, I then saw that theirs were not well made, nor were they

true. I now know that those sculptors worked from plaster-casts taken from Nature; I thought only of copying my model. I don't believe these sculptors knew what was good modelling and what was not, or could get out of Nature all there was in it. As my memory was good, I copied in those days, at home, the pictures I admired at the Louvre. Many of the things I made in my studio were better then than anything I have since executed, and, had I been less negligent, some of them might have been preserved. I would now give many thousands of francs if I could have some of those figures. Since then I have known the value of good friends; but, if I could have had even one in those days, it might have been a world to me. Then I did not know my work had any merit?" *

When the Franco-German war broke out Rodin served as a corporal in the National Guard, performed his duties, starved on horse flesh and stale bread, and modelled whenever he had the opportunity and the means. At the end of the war we find him at Brussels with Belleuse, working on the Cariatides for the Bourse (inside), and on the frieze of the Palais des Académies. Some trifling matter

* Mr. Bartlett: *The American Architect.*

Paris, Musée du Luxembourg

THE AGE OF BRONZE

(Bronze)

of jealously occasioned his leaving Belleuse, and he formed a partnership with one Van Rasbourg, a connection which was not unprofitable, but which, on the whole, proved unsatisfactory and was soon terminated. He then returned to the more personal work of his own studio. It was at this time (in 1875) that he was struck by a quality in his work which recalled the work of Michelangelo ; a quality which had occurred spontaneously and which was not at all premeditated imitation. Perplexed, interested, a little startled perhaps, by the resemblance, Rodin decided to go to Italy to investigate the cause and to arrive, if possible, at the principles which governed the construction of the Italian masterpieces. Hitherto his theory had been that the controlling factor in the art of sculpture was movement. He returned from Italy with the conviction that this principle lay in the model ; that the inspiration of Renaissance sculpture was derived directly from the study of the human figure ; not in the imitation of the antique, but in going to the same source.

" *La première chose à laquelle Dieu a pensé en crêant le monde*," says Judith Cladel, " *si nous pouvons nous imaginer la pensée de Dieu—c'est au modelé.*" It was

the cry of the Renaissance in all art, this cry of the return to Nature; and, at first, it was said of Rodin as it was said of Delacroix, if one may use a paraphrase, "*c'est la massacre de la sculpture.*" Henceforward his studio was to be what the palaestra was to Pheidas and Praxiteles, a field of observation for the human figure in every variety of movement. Inspired by his observation of the works of Michelangelo, of Donatello, of the antique, Rodin worked for eighteen months on the figure now known as the "Age of Bronze," but to which his first, and, it would seem, more appropriate title was *L'Homme qui s'éveille à la Nature.* This figure was exhibited in January 1877 at the Cercle Artistique in Brussels, and its mixed reception gave Rodin a foretaste of what was to occur on the exhibition of his later works.

II

RODIN was now thirty-seven, and had scarcely, yet, found an opportunity for adequate self-expression. His works in sculpture amounted to *The Man with the Broken Nose*, the head of a priest, of a doctor, of a young girl (*La Petite Alsacienne* completed at Strasburg), of (it is interesting to note in view of *La Porte de l'Enfer*) a Ugolino, the small unsaleable terra-cottas, a few other works which perished in the clay, and, finally, *The Age of Bronze*. These had been the fruits of his leisure, of the thought stolen from the hours during which he was engaged in carrying out the ideas of Belleuse and others. In view of the quality of what remains, the loss of his other work is a matter of infinite regret.

It is useless, but interesting, to conjecture how a more immediate success might have affected the

tendency of Rodin's art; if, for instance, *The Man with the Broken Nose* had been accepted by the Salon of 1864, and criticised as approximating to the modelling of the Greeks, instead of this happening in 1878. It might have created a storm which the premature recognition of genius has rarely weathered. But in Rodin's case, however, it may be doubted that it would have mattered, any more than it would have mattered in the case of any great creative artist,—a Dante, a Milton, a Molière—whose art has been the irresistible expression of a temperament which is, at root, philosophic. This sort of temperament, absorbed in problems of the universal, has other things to think about than the immediate recognition of its qualities; or, it may be that when this combination of the artistic and philosophic character occurs, the various qualities exercise a common sustaining power, which makes what one calls success, if not a matter of great indifference, at least not a matter of first importance.

Rodin was still a workman whose skill and facility in the exercise of his craft had won the admiration of his comrades; and, on the whole, he was content to be a workman. He has said, that during these years of probation he was not conscious

of possessing ability out of the common. That would seem an amazing statement, were it not realised that he approached his work as a student, and that his standard was high. Possibly but few of his contemporaries seemed to him to possess ability out of the common ; this is largely a matter of perspective. His life in Brussels remains with him a pleasant memory. He lived on the outskirts of the city in one room. There was a little garden attached with a tree in it, where he might sit and take the air with his wife. There was also the larger contentment, the spaciousness of country and sky, all the charm and suggestiveness of Belgian landscape, which have provided refreshment and inspiration for many artists, to be obtained in a country walk, when the pleasures of his little garden were exhausted. In this wholly sane and reasonable existence, in this life of work, of reverie, of thought, of detachment from material things, there may have entered a desire for liberation from the bonds which fettered his complete art expression. But Rodin was scarcely, even here, waiting for his opportunity ; not, at least, in the ordinary sense of waiting to exploit his talent as if it were an article of commerce. Suppression, in such circum-

stances, may be a factor in self-development, self-realisation, as it was, one may think, in the case of Rodin. His emotional life at this period culminated in the symbol, "*L'Homme qui s'éveille à la Nature*," a foreshadowing of his awakening to a personal sense of Nature which as time went on was to become more and more articulate in sculpture.

The Age of Bronze and *The Man with the Broken Nose*, the latter now under the title of a *Portrait of M.* ——, were exhibited at the Salons of 1877 and 1878. Over a quarter of a century has passed, and *The Age of Bronze* has become one of the familiar things of the world—except to the guardians of the gardens of the Luxembourg, as I have had occasion to notice. From its place in the Luxembourg Gardens it has been removed recently to the Musée du Luxembourg ; and it may be mentioned that M. Rodin prefers the open air for the statue, as sculpture, particularly when it is cast in bronze, needs an equal diffusion of light which does not always exist in a gallery. On its exhibition at the Salon the figure was badly placed, and criticised adversely. But its position, and the commentary which within a few years has become entirely reversed, were small matters

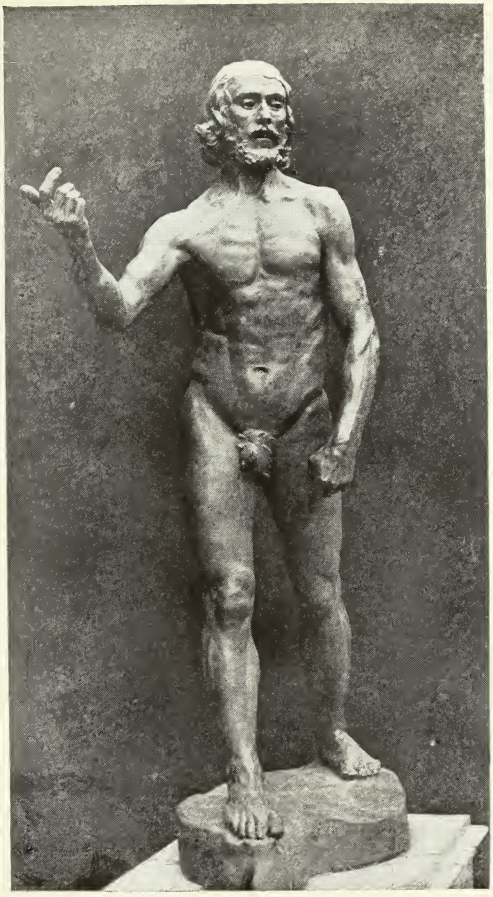


Photo Mansell *Paris, Musee du Luxembourg*

"ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST"

(*Bronze*)

compared with the grave charge that Rodin had made his figure with moulds cast direct from life. Rodin found this accusation sufficiently disconcerting. The offence was not unknown among sculptors ; but it would be difficult to formulate a charge more likely to wound the feelings of a sculptor with a conscience ; and it was particularly irrelevant in the case of Rodin. He had neither money nor friends to back him in the matter. So far as the world was concerned he was merely an employé of Belleuse. But, after all, the charge was groundless, and that was the main thing. Photographs and moulds taken from his model, a young Belgian soldier, which he procured from Brussels, were not sufficient to clear the air. Whereupon Rodin determined to convince his opponents by producing a figure, equally true to Nature, but on a larger scale than life. This figure, *St. John the Baptist*, was exhibited at the Salon two years later.

Meanwhile, M. Edmond Turquet was in 1879 appointed Under Secretary of State for Fine Arts. He had been attracted by *The Age of Bronze* at the Salon. Convinced of its genuineness, he proceeded on his appointment to investigate the charge which had been made against Rodin, and delegates were

sent to Brussels to see the model. Further, and independently of the minister, a group of artists, with M. Paul Dubois at their head (he had visited, with the sculptor Chapuis, Rodin at his studio), sent a letter to M. Turquet stating that "*loin d'avoir fait un moulage sur nature, M. Rodin a créé une très belle figure et qu'il sera un grand sculpteur.*" * Among the signatories to the letter were Carrier Belleuse, Laplanche, Falguière, Chaplin, and Chapuis.

The upshot of the attack, and of the discussion which it occasioned, gave Rodin a larger share of celebrity than he was likely, as yet, to have derived merely from the merit of his work. It provided him with a public, with friends, and—with what, perhaps, was of more importance in vitalising his temperament,—plenty of hostility. He was finally vindicated completely, and the purchase of the statue by the State was the last word in the matter.

* Judith Cladel : Auguste Rodin.

III

IN 1877 Rodin visited the French Cathedrals, those precious links in the continuity of plastic thought in France—a continuity in which is the most individual manifestion of the genius of the French race. In painting, in the arts of literature and the drama, even in architecture, France has her rivals, equal in performance if various in kind. But in the art of sculpture, from mediæval times to the present day, the tradition has been preserved as in no other country. The effloresence of the Renaissance in Italy, with its gallery of splendid achievement, a quarry from which, later, the sculptors of France persistently derived, was, in comparison, the expression of a period which may be comprised within a circle of dates like our own Elizabethan literature. In France the circle is indefinitely extended. Prior even to the Italian Renaissance, anticipating its

breadth, its qualities, both structural and psychological, is there not the Philip the Bold of Claux Sluter at Dijon, which, like the Colleoni of Verocchio and Leopardi at Venice, would seem to express not merely the spirit and life of an individual, of a type, but of a race and a generation? The sculptures of the Gothic period, which Rodin had now set forth to examine, are, like the sculptures of the Panathenaic freize, mainly decorative, subordinate to the architecture; but there, of course, the comparison ends. Gothic sculpture—subservient as it was to a larger purpose, an elemental form, as yet, which was to give birth to the pure sculpture of the Renaissance,—was, nevertheless, a living art, of individual and high cultivation.

Rodin's *St. John the Baptist*, exhibited at the Salon of 1880, would seem almost to have been achieved under the influence of the memory of his visit to Chartres and Rheims. Incomparably more accomplished in technique it suggests something of the Gothic spirit. It has been called a protest against academic influences; but one may believe that neither here nor in any of his work was Rodin solely animated by any such feeling. His lack of sympathy for the scholarly and conventional in

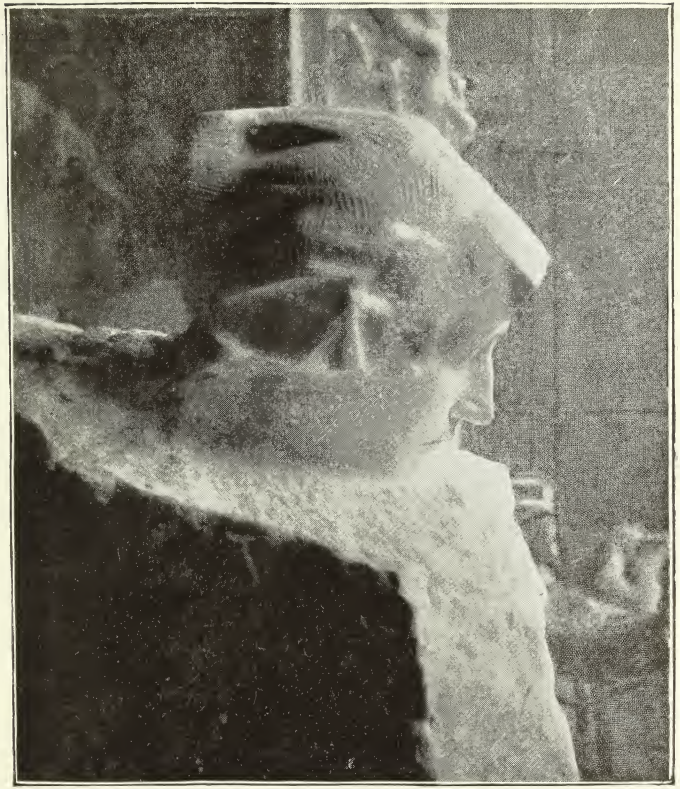
French sculpture found expression in a more determined insistence on his own point of view ; it may have helped him to find himself. And without the school, the associated, scholarly influence, which has existed in France since the days of Louis XIV., a Rodin, just as a Frémiet or a Carpeaux, might have been impossible. The school provided a *milieu* for the rebel.

But if the creation of *St. John the Baptist* is attributed to Gothic influences, it must be with many reservations. For here, as indeed in all Rodin's work, may be observed a curious, almost elusive, eclecticism. "*Je suis dans la tradition des primitifs*," he has said, "*des Égyptiens, des Grecs, des Romains. Je me suis simplement appliqué à copier la nature. Je l'interprète comme je la vois, selon mon tempérament, ma sensibilité, d'après les sentiments qu'elle évoque en moi. Je n'ai pas cherché à l'arranger, je ne lui ai pas appliqué les lois de la composition, je ne me suis pas astreint à harmoniser ses mouvements. Je l'ai observée et je l'ai saisi dans son plein abandon, dans sa pleine vie, dans sa pleine harmonie.*" *

In this direct approach to Nature may perhaps be found the secret of Rodin's eclecticism ; for

* Claris (E.), "De l'impressionnisme en sculpture."

nature herself is eclectic. A contemporary model may present the same aspect as a model for the Assyrian reliefs presented to the sculptors of that day; or may there not be the same measure in his stride as in that of an Egyptian king? In speaking of Nature, Rodin, with great simple-mindedness, would seem to leave himself out of account. He says, in effect, that you merely have to look at things and the rest comes of itself, according to your temperament. He says further—and he insists on the point—that he has no preconceived ideas with regard to his subject. *The model suggests the subject.* But this seeing of things for oneself is, after all, the most considerable achievement of an artist. Imagination in its highest expression is the realisation of the actual, of what exists, of what is before one's eyes, or of that which it connotes. It is not a matter of invention, but of seeing. There is nothing to which one is so blind as the obvious; nothing we find so difficult to apprehend as our own emotions. A Michelangelo, a Turner, a Balzac, or a Dickens, provide generations with eyes and emotions. And Rodin's view of Nature is so sweeping, so comprehensive, so pantheistic really, and yet a view so natural to himself, himself "*une*



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"LA PENSÉE"

force de la nature" (as he has been called), that he seems a little oblivious of the importance of the temperament in connection with the creation of a work of art. For, look at it how one may, it is the artist's sense of the fitness of things which produces the work of art. He selects the model in the first instance, and seizes the moment which appeals to him as the right moment.

But an artist may approach Nature in various ways. *St. John the Baptist* is a theme on which many sculptors have played. There are, for instance, the two St. Johns of Donatello; and here, one feels, that the sculptor was moved by religious fervour and belief, by an abstract conception of the Precursor, while using the symbols associated with St. John, and clothing him after the manner in which he lived. The splendid qualities of his art were put humbly to the service of the realisation of a religious conception. With Rodin the process, we fancy, was entirely different. His St. John is perfectly satisfactory as an interpretative figure; criticism at least has been content to accept it from that point of view. But is it the whole point of view? He starts from the concrete, from Nature herself, from, in fact, the model.

Donatello appeals to truth from the abstract; Rodin to the abstract from truth. The one says, in effect, here is St. John; the other, here is a figure which a literary friend says represents St. John. In one case the definite title is appropriate; in the other, it is not perhaps of so much importance. It is possibly not carrying the distinction too far, to say that Donatello appeals to one's artistic sense through the emotions occasioned by his realisation of the Baptist, and Rodin through the verisimilitude of his figure, apart from any preconceived ideas. The realisation of truth in a matter of æsthetics is an intellectual adventure, of which we are only beginning to realise the importance. "Nothing," Rodin has said, "is ugly that has life. . . . Whatever suggests human emotion, whether of grief or pain, goodness or anger, hate or love, has its individual seal of beauty. Therefore, since I hold all existence to be beautiful, and all beauty to be truth—*on a bien le droit de choisir parmi les choses vraies.*" *

A smaller figure of St. John, in bronze, incomplete, without the head and arms, may be referred to here; as it helps, I think, to explain an attitude

* *Pall Mall Magazine*, 1901, p. 26.

of Rodin which is imperfectly understood. This incomplete figure represents, just as adequately as the complete figure, his theories with regard to the principles of movement and modelling in sculpture. It is a synthesis of his views in this respect. And, as the complete figure, in this instance, has been achieved and labelled, he cannot very well be accused of artistic incompetence, or of failing inspiration. Obviously Rodin himself regards the dismembered St. John, cast in bronze and to a smaller scale, as sufficiently fulfilling the purposes of his art. And if the starting-point in art is Nature, in which "l'insecte vaut un monde, il a autant coûté," one may account for the æsthetic satisfaction we derive from a bronze figure deprived of its head and arms. Who would, for instance, maintain that a torso of Praxiteles was not worth more than galleries of completed and labelled sculpture? Or, in painting, who would ask, in a representation of inanimate nature, that the tree should be extended to its topmost twig or farthest branch? Art, it is well to remember, is not the actual thing, but a representation of the actual thing, that is to say, of Nature. A completed figure in sculpture can, therefore, only suggest the

complete figure, as it is not the actual figure ; and a torso may be thus as suggestive of the complete figure as the complete figure itself.

Apart from this, it is within the province of a sculptor to represent a torso as it is for him to represent a bust. Is not the completeness of a work of art the representation of that which is complete in the artist's mind ? and in sculpture, what Mr. Freeman calls "the sensationed impression" of a torso may be equal to that derived from the representation of the whole figure. Rodin, in one respect if in no other, suggests a parallel with the Greeks ; for if only fragments of the statue of St. John remained each would possess an artistic value for the perfection of its modelling.

St. John the Baptist was exhibited at the Salon of 1882 together with the Age of Bronze, now cast in bronze and in the possession of the State. For these exhibits Rodin was awarded a medal of the third class.

IV

IN 1879 Carrier Belleuse was appointed art director of the Sèvres Porcelain Works. He engaged Rodin to decorate vases ; and one of his vases, purchased by the State, is preserved in the Sèvres Museum. It was about this time (1879) that Rodin took part in a competition to commemorate *la Défense Nationale*, an echo of the Franco-German War. The sketch which he submitted was not, according to Mlle. Cladel, included among the first thirty chosen by the jury for further consideration.

Rodin had been through the siege of Paris. He had known and realised the horrors of war ; and it did not present itselt to him in symbolic and plastic form as a pyramid capped by an ideal figure, surrounded by animated and graceful nudities. *Le Génie de la Guerre* dominates the group. This is a winged figure with vibrant outstretched arms ; the

evil face is contorted with passion, and the mouth is hurling forth invectives of blood and misery. One wing is broken, and at the knees is the bent figure of a wounded soldier, superbly modelled, supporting himself on his broken sword. The group is as dramatic as war itself; war, not as conquest, not as glory, but as tragedy. Placed in the position for which it was intended, *Le Rond Point de Courbevoie*, such a group would have kept the memory of a terrible time an open wound. Rodin failed also to be selected in another competition for a bust of the Republic. Himself a man of the people, he saw forces which make both for good and evil in democratic government; and it was scarcely likely that an impartial conception would be appreciated by a partial jury.

But an event occurred about this time (1880) which marked the turning-point in Rodin's career; an event which not only gave him liberty for the free and unrestrained exercise of his art; but which, one may think, largely affected the tendencies of much of his later work. M. Turquet, who had befriended him in the matter of *The Age of Bronze*, now offered him a commission for an important public work, the great door for the *Musée des*

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LA DANAÏDE

(*Marble*)

Arts Decoratifs, upon which Rodin has been intermittently engaged ever since, and which has as yet to be completed. This commission provided him with a studio at the Government's expense, and with sufficient means to carry out his work.

The initial idea of the subject or the door was, that it should be derived from the cantos of Dante's "Inferno," and called *La Porte de l'Enfer ;* an idea which has not been quite fulfilled, but which at the time was congenial to Rodin. It would, at any rate, serve as a starting-point. He still felt the sting of the accusation of having cast his figure from the model, and the motives of the subject were susceptible of treatment at various scales, in the round, in high and low reliefs, in which his sheerly technical honesty would be made manifest. So that one of the most imaginative achievements of modern sculpture had its origin largely in the desire or the artist to clear up an obvious and absurd misrepresentation. "*Je ne crois pas*," says M. Edouard Rod, "*qu'il existe, en sculpture, une page plus éloquente, ni plus variée.*"

The height of the door is about eighteen feet. It is dominated by three figures, the *Three*

Phantoms, imaginatively grouped so that the visible shadows help to emphasise the sense of destiny, of pity, the mystery of contemplative and controlling elements, which they express. Below, projecting from the frieze, is the figure of *The Thinker* (*Le Penseur*), originally intended for Dante, but happier in its generic title. This figure is approached on each side by a procession entering the gate. On the Door itself, on its vague and plastic background, are represented the various circles (but not those of the cantos) of human tribulation. On the narrow pilasters, at either side, are represented symbols of achieved and defeated passion.

A beautiful disorder, M. Roger Miles has said, is an effect of art; certainly here in this gesticulation of the flesh, in the varying *motifs* united by a common *motif* represented by " *Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'entrate*, there is a complete effect. Here, at any rate, in his audacious use of the nude Rodin shows a complete mastery of his material. So far, indeed, as the general scheme is concerned (and one would not push the comparison further in view of the unfinished state of the work) it is a more logical expression of purely plastic thought than the bronze gates of Ghiberti of the Baptistery of Florence,

which are rather pictorial than sculpturesque. The portal in this instance provides a frame for a series,—a wonderful series,—of small pictures, each one of which is in itself an independent work of art. The Door of Rodin represents a complete idea, a rhythm with varying motives; it is an epic of human weakness, human destiny, the futility or human desire.

The conception, as a whole, can hardly be said to be Dantesque, although it follows the Inferno in general idea and in some points of detail. Rodin was also largely influenced by Baudelaire, "le misanthrope de la vie coupable," in whose *Fleurs du mal* he discovered some affinity to Dante. It seems a far cry from the serene, essentially religious, view of Dante to the morbid paganism of the French décadent. "*L'une vient de l'enfer, l'autre y va*," as a French writer has said. Rodin would seem to have assimilated the spirit of both Dante and Baudelaire, and, finally, while borrowing from each, to have arrived at a personal point of view: The Door, in fine, is Rodinesque.

Dante's Inferno is documentary. Animated by didactic religious faith, he has peopled his circles with historic persons, who suffer the torments or

hell as conceived by a religious visionary of the thirteenth or fourteenth century. Baudelaire, on the other hand, modern, pagan, a virtuoso of sensations, seeking experiences rather than experiencing life, sincere as an artist, and a little affected in most other directions, discovered Limbo without having crossed the Acheron. It existed in his imagination, in his life.

Rodin has given shape to two, at least, of the most important passages in the *Inferno*. There are Paolo and Francesco, "those two who go together, and seem to be so light upon the wind," and there are Count Ugolino and his sons. Virgil, however, is not represented; and Rodin could not see Beatrice in the nude. The Ugolino group depicts the brutal horror of the incident, but not at its moment of greatest horror, where Dante and Virgil discover Ugolino gnawing at the head of his enemy Ruggieri. The Count is represented nude, blind, crawling on his knees, his hands groping over the bodies of his sons. In his own words, "When we had come to the fourth day, Gaddo flung himself down outstretched at my feet, saying, 'My father, why dost thou not help me.' There he died, and as thou seest me, so saw I the three sink down

one by one between the fifth and sixth days; then, already blind, I betook me to grope about over each of them, and for three days I called upon them when they were dead; after which want of food effected more than sorrow." The Door, as has been said, is as yet unfinished. Rodin lingers over it as a poet lingers over a poem, eliminating, revising, recasting, always seeking for a more perfect expression.

"In an aim before all of his studies," says M. Rod, speaking in an intimate study of the Door, "he sought the occasion of bringing together various compositions, with figures restrained and in movement. At that moment, that is to say, in the full maturity of his art, M. Rodin, as formerly Delacroix, did not think that he could find expression otherwise than in movement: later he recognised that there was something dangerous and false in this theory. Movement, in effect, is only compatible in a certain degree with the exigences and means of the plastic arts: there are movements which it is imprudent or impossible to attempt to represent, because they are fugitive, and cannot be fixed." Possibly here M. Rod was thinking of Lessing's statement that sculpture should express nothing

that can be thought of as transitory. "M. Rodin said formerly," M. Rod continues, "*L'éloquence de la sculpture est dans le mouvement.*" He says to-day: "*L'éloquence de la sculpture est dans le modelé.*" *

* *Gazette des Beux Arts*, 1898, vol. i. p. 421.

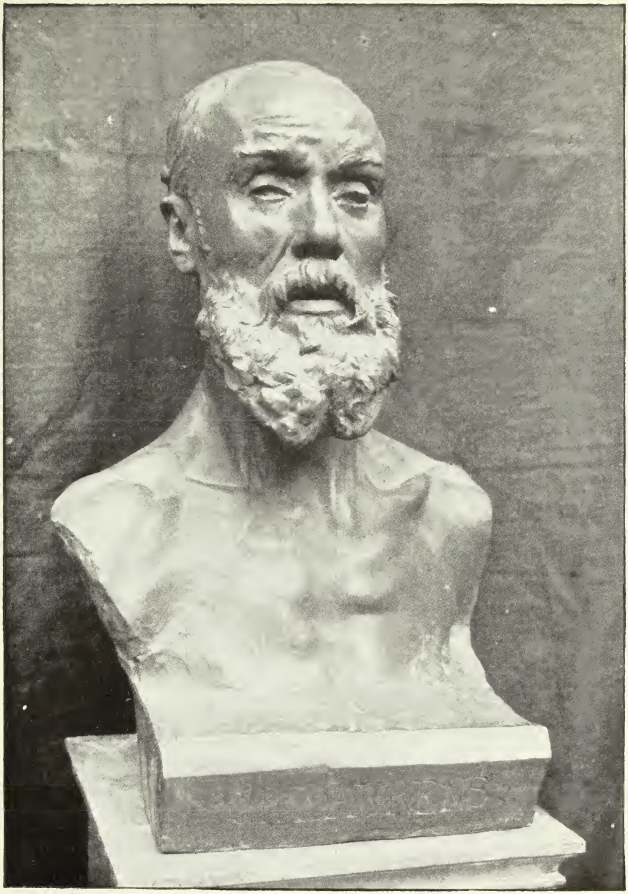
V

THE Commission for *la Porte de l'Enfer* provided Rodin with the opportunity to express himself. Hitherto we have known him by *The Man with the Broken Nose*, by his *St. John*, and *The Age of Bronze*—each, speaking broadly, a manifestation of the actual in art. But the conception of the Door seemed to give wings to his plastic thought; to open the way to a a range or new ideas.

The Door itself, decorative, necessarily subordinate to a structural idea, restricted in point of scale, was a conception of spiritual things which contained elements susceptible of independent treatment. The *Three Phantoms* and *The Thinker*, necessary as they are to the whole composition, are admirable as independent works, and to a larger scale. *The Thinker*, which in its pose so obviously recalls *Il Pensieroso* of the Medicean tombs, gains in effectiveness

and power with the larger treatment; and the increased scale of the *Three Phantoms* adds to their portentous and fateful aspect. In dealing with an abstract idea,—particularly with ideas of such a mystical and grandiose kind as those expressed in *The Thinker* and the *Three Phantoms*, metaphysical ideas of destiny and fate,—scale itself may be an element of some importance. But with a group like the Ugolino it is different. In the concrete presentment of an incident, terrible as it may be, where the emotions are definite and comprehensible, where the idea is essentially dramatic, the larger scale does not broaden the effect of the idea. And one feels that the crawling figure of Ugolino gains nothing in tragic suggestiveness in its monumental shape.

With M. Turquet's important commission, the life of Rodin as a workman,—as the skilled interpreter of the ideas of Carrier Belleuse and others,—came to an end. Within a couple of years his works were exhibited in London, Vienna, Pau; and *The Age of Bronze* had been placed in the gardens of the Luxembourg. In the Salon of 1881 the *Creation of Man* was exhibited. A year later there appeared his busts of *J. P. Laurens* and *Carrier*



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BUST OF JEAN-PAUL LAURENS

(*Bronze*)

Belleuse,—the beginning of a remarkable series in portraiture, which has included Henley, Rochefort, Legros, Puvis de Chavannes, Octave Mirbeau, Roger Marx, Victor Hugo, and others. And in this phase of his art, opinion, which is so much at variance in regard to the other phases, meets on a common ground. To find a series, or even individual works, possessing the insight which gives not only a likeness, but a biography with multitudinous annotations, one must go back to the Diderot, the Voltaire, the Franklin, the Molière of Houdon, to the portrait busts of the Italian Renaissance, or to the Romans.

Rodin's genius, now unfettered, began, further, to find voluminous and splendid expression in such works as *Le Baiser*, *L'Eternel Printemps*, the *Eve*, the *Monuments of Victor Hugo*, *Bastien Lepage*, the *Bourgeois of Calais*, the *Balzac;* and in such mystical subjects as *Le crépuscule descendant dans la nuit*, *La misère ou la fatigue*, *La parque et la jeune fille*, *La main de Dieu*, and so on, which, as they were exhibited, puzzled an interested, but largely inimical, public. The general view of his work may be said to have followed an evolutionary course, not infrequent in the case of art which makes for any sort or

permanence. The successive stages of this public recognition may be classed briefly as, at first, active disapproval, then curiosity as to meaning, later a recognition that, after all, the work *may* mean *something*, and, finally, a concession that it is extremely original, or that it possesses beauty and power; or that it is an outrage on all the canons of art. That, in a general way, may be said to summarise the critical process in regard to creative work which does not follow the official path; a process in France made sufficiently familiar to men of genius like Delacroix, Carpeaux, and Rude, and, more recently, to Rodin. In turning over the pages of criticism, it is curious to find an eminent English critic and scholar denouncing Carpeaux's group at the Opera on the score of pruriency. In the consideration of art matters in France, however, one cannot reckon without taking into account the influence of the State; and this influence of departmental control in certain matters in relation to fine art has been a power for good.

The self-respecting qualities of a nation may be largely estimated by the degree of its concern for art. It is a tribute to the French that the affairs of an artist may become an affair of State; that

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LE BAISER

(*Marble*)

genius is recognised as a national possession, a precious national asset, if you will, which it may be desirable to care for, encourage, and subsidise for the honour and glory of the country. This practical realisation that a man of genius is not merely an independent person, with or without a studio, in which to live or starve (as, indeed, he has starved even in Paris), but that his art is a well spring, a source of national enlightenment, fostering the sensitive and estimable qualities of the race down through infinite generations, adds greatly to one's conception of the logic and fine intelligence of the French temperament. It was largely due to this wise and paternal supervision that Rodin's existence as an artist (although rather late in the day) became possible. The State, through its expert, M. Turquet, had purchased *The Age of Bronze;* it had given him the commission for the Door; and, later, it purchased four of his works—*St. John the Baptist*, the aged figure in bronze, *Elle qui fut Heaulmière*, *Madame Roll*, and the group which is probably the most generally familiar and popular of his works, *Le Baiser;* all of which are now on view in the Luxembourg.

Le Baiser is the variation of a theme which

Rodin has expressed in *Le Printemps*, and in that singularly beautiful group, *L'Eternelle Idole;* it is the theme of the eternal man and woman, the creation of a mind which sees in the act of a lover's caress, in its passion and mystery, a universal and permanent symbol. When *Le Baiser* was purchased by the State in 1898, M. Léonce Bénédite recalled the fact that it was not a recent work, but —"*l'œil*," he said, "*s'habitue peu à peu inconsciemment à des nouveautés qu'il avait jadis impitoyablement condamnées.*" This was not only true in the present instance, but applicable almost to every work that has come out of Rodin's studio.

VI

IF Rodin's relations with the State, which in effect were the relations with a Minister of taste, were fortunate, his relations with Municipalities—the inexpert representatives of an inexpert public—and with one Society, at least, were not so happy. When in 1883 the town of Nancy, the capital of Lorraine, decided to erect a statue of the painter Claude Gellée (*dit* Claude Lorraine) Rodin was the chosen sculptor. Nancy was neither Claude's birthplace nor place of residence; but he appears to have spent a year in his early manhood there in colouring the ceiling of the Carmelite Church. Rodin has represented Claude standing, his face turned to the east, to the rising sun, "*l'image du peintre au moment où il s'approprie les lois lumineuses.*" The figure, strikingly individual, looks as if it had walked out of a canvas of the seventeenth century. Gellée is scrutinising

the horizon, with an eager, almost an inspired look. The face is rather typical of Houdon's manner; and there is no apparent attempt at idealisation.

"*Cette statue, nous la trouvons mauvaise, et pourtant nous ne sommes pas des bêtes,*" exclaimed one of the local authorities, according to M. Maillard, when it was exhibited at Nancy; and all the powers of local influence were engaged to have the monument removed, although the pedestal was generally approved. It was only through the tireless efforts of M. Roger Marx, and a M. Gallé, that it was allowed to retain its original position in the Pépinière Park, where it now is, and where it has effected a gradual conquest or adverse opinion.

Rodin was, meanwhile, engaged on another work by which Calais, after a lapse of some five hundred years, sought to revive a memory of the patriotism and chivalry of its inhabitants. One wonders whether the memory of a splendid act of heroism had remained with the people of Calais over that considerable period; or whether they had been stirred by the comparatively recent revival of interest in the pages of Froissart? As Froissart is not accepted as an unimpeachable authority by the

exact historian, it was possibly the discovery of Jehan le Bel's Chronicles which finally settled the matter. This discovery must have been welcome to your true Calesian, as it confirmed the hitherto unconfirmed story of the heroism of the six burgesses. Froissart, who founded his Chronicles on those of Jehan le Bel, is more detailed and more picturesque than the earlier writer; but it is not quite clear whether these qualities are due to later information or to a sense of literary effect. So far as the story of the siege of Calais is concerned, Jehan le Bel, for instance, only records the names or two of the six heroic burgesses, whereas Froissart, in Berner's translation, gives the names of four, and in the Vatican manuscript, edited by Lettenhove, he gives the whole six.

In the brave and decorative times or Cressy and Poitiers, of the Hundred Years War, many gallant and chivalrous exploits were performed in the heat of battle; but as an instance of at once moral and undecorative courage that of the beleaguered citizens of Calais is a thing apart.

When Philip of Valois in the year 1346 decamped from the hill of Sangate, Edward III. was left in possession of the field, and the garrison of Calais in

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a hopeless case. After withstanding a siege of eighteen months, battered and starved, Philip had been their last straw. They attempted negotiations; the Governor, Lord John de Vienne mounted the battlements and made a sign to the English that he wished to hold a parley. When Sir Walter Manny and Lord Basset, the emissaries of Edward appeared, Lord John, after explaining that they were "most exceedingly straitened," asked that the citizens might be allowed to evacuate the town, "*to let us go and depart as we be, and lette hym* [Edward] *take the towne and castell and all the goodes that be therein, the whiche is great habundance.*"

But Edward had been held at bay too long; the siege had cost him blood and treasure.

"*Sir Gaultyer of Manny*," he said, "*ye shall goo and say to the captayne that all the grace that he shall finde nowe in me is that they lette sixe of the chiefe burgesses of the towne come out bare heeded, bare foted and bare legged, and in their shertes, with haulters about their neckes, with the kayes of the towne and castell in their handes, and lette theym sixe yelde themselfe purely to my wyll and the resydewe I wyll take to mercy.*"

When this message was communicated to Lord John de Vienne, "he went into the market-place

Photogr.
Druet

THE BURGESSES OF CALAIS.

and sowned the common bell." Whereupon all the inhabitants, men and women, assembled in the town hall, and heard the news. "*Thanne all the people beganne to wepe and to make such sorowe, that there was nat so hard a hert if they had sene them but that wolde have had great pytie of them; the captayne hym selfe wepte pyteously.*" Then, after a short time, the most wealthy citizen of the town, by name Eustace de St. Pierre, rose up and said: "*Sirs, great and small, great myschiefe it shulde be to suffre to dye suche people as be in this towne, either by famyn or otherwyse, whan there is a meane to save theym: I thynke he or they shulde have great merytte of our Lorde God that myght kepe theym fro suche myschiefe; as for my parte, I have so good truste in our Lorde God, that if I dye in the quarell to save the residewe, that God wolde pardone me; wherefore, to save them, I wyll be the first to putte my lyfe in jeopardy.*

"*When he had thus sayde, every man worshypped hym, and dyvers kneled downe at his fete with sore wepyng and sore sighes. Than another honest burgesse rose and sayde, I wyll kepe company with my gossyppe Ewstace; he was called John Dayre. Than rose up Jaques of Wyssant, who was riche in goodes and herytage; he sayd also that he wolde holde company*

with his two cosyns; in likwyse so dyd Peter of Wyssant his brother; and thane rose two other; they sayde they wolde do the same. Thanne they went and aparelled them as the kynge desyred. Than the captayne went with them to the gate: ther was great lamentacyon made of men, women and chyldren at their departyng: than the gate was opyned and he yssued out with the vi burgesses, and closed the gate agayne." *

This, briefly, is the incident, as told by Froissart, which Rodin had to guide him in his work. The later events, Queen Philippa's intercession, the release and regalement of the prisoners, the happy ending, did not concern him; any more then it concerned, at that moment, the grim, over-wrought, suffering Eustace de St. Pierre and his companions. There was no bravado, no affectation of cheerfulness in trying circumstances: theirs was heroism, but it was the stolid heroism of defeat. The lives of the citizens would be saved, but the town and its treasure would go to the enemy. In this procession of bare-headed, bare-footed men, with halters round their necks, Eustace de St. Pierre, aged, feeble, dejected, with his hands falling limply by his side, leads the way; a picture of the resigna-

* Berner's *Froissart*.

tion of age to the inevitable. To his left a younger and sturdier figure, James Wisant, possibly, carries the keys. In his uplifted head, in his strong features, in the fierce compression of the lips, in the strenuous feet, which in their reluctant progress seem to grip the ground, are indicated the passionate self-control of a man who had otherwise known no defeat except in death. The figure to the right of Eustace, who with uplifted hand is addressing his neighbours, bears a family resemblance to the man with the keys and is probably his brother, Peter Wisant. In the wake of these, a younger man than the rest, less capable of the self-control of his companions, half turns towards the friends whom he is leaving. And, again, immediately behind James Wisant, there is another figure—Jehans de Fiennes or Andrieus d'André—with his face buried in his hands.

This figure of lamentation is to the group what a chorus is to a Greek tragedy ; he is the theme which runs through the whole composition. Although the monument was suggested by the "Chronicles of Froissart," it exists as a piece of sculpture independently of text. The six figures, heroic creatures of an untoward fate, are sufficiently typical

of the destiny which overhangs them and which has overhung others. They have, indeed, started on a march which will take them farther than the English camp outside the gates of Calais.

The original idea of the committee for the monument was to commemorate the incident by the representation of the figure of its chief actor, Eustace de St. Pierre ; and it is characteristic of Rodin that in his preliminary sketch he should have submitted the present group. This was a departure from the suggestion of the committee, and it was largely a departure from the tradition of monuments of the kind. In St. Pierre's heroism, Rodin saw not merely the act of an individual, but the act of a community. His group typifies the various characters which go to make up a community : it is an expression in sculpture of the historic sense ; it not only admirably illustrates the actual event, but a never ending procession of humanity.

In this powerful and unaffected return to nature, it has been suggested that Rodin may have arrived at a new style for monuments of the kind. But where art is so definitely a matter of personal seeing, iconoclastic, and so utterly frank in its expression, it begins and ends in itself, and is but

little concerned with the formulas of schools and style.

Rodin disagreed with the authorities at Calais as to the position and the placing of his monument. He desired for it the historic association of the ancient market-place, and he wished it to be placed on a column of some height. But the authorities preferred the Place de la Poste, and a low pedestal.

VII

RODIN started, as he ends, with Nature; but between the two periods his view has broadened, developed; Nature has come to possess almost another meaning. From the study of fact, of the actual thing, there is a natural progression of ideas to the mystery which lies behind it. The realisation of a fact, as a complete thing in itself, is a very imperfect sort of realisation. Rodin, in much of his earlier work, was to some extent contented with the fact. In *The Age of Bronze*, for instance, in the *St. John the Baptist*, even in the *Claude Gellée* monument. In his later work there has become manifest a deeper seeing which he is ever striving to make more articulate in sculpture. Standing in his studio at Meudon, where the work of his life is so largely represented, one is affected by a sense of the universal. These various forms and groups do not

speak to one, with the art of Greece, of eternal beauty ; but as it were, with a suggestion of the voice of the mountain and the stars, of forces curiously blending the primæval and contemporary.

Among Rodin's later works (he does not acknowledge a *chef d'œuvre*) there are his monument of Victor Hugo and his statue of Balzac. The former was exhibited at the New Salon in 1897, and was complete so far as the figure of Victor Hugo was concerned, but the Muses of Inspiration, Tragedy, and so forth, and the group of Syrens with which it is intended to occupy the foreground, were only represented by two figures which had scarcely advanced beyond an experimental stage, but which were sufficiently suggestive of the quality of Rodin's work. The symbolic figures have not yet been completed, and it may be supposed that the sculptor has not arrived at the personal seeing necessary for the purpose. But these figures, useful as they may be in the composition of the monument, can add nothing to the spacious and splendid conception of Victor Hugo himself. M. Rodin had many opportunities of studying his subject in the friendly relations of life. Victor Hugo refused to pose to him ; but consented to his having

materials at hand, so that any impression of the moment could be instantly recorded. As a mere matter of fact the resemblance can be tested by living memory, by photographs and portraits.

With the *Balzac* it was different. To those who have read and delighted in the *Comédie Humaine*, it must seem a surprising fact that there is not extraordinary and voluminous evidence as to the details of the personal appearance of its author. The contrary, however, appears to be the case. A sepia drawing by Louis Boulanger executed about 1828, a portrait in oils by the same artist exhibited at the Salon of 1837, a medallion by David Angers (now in the Louvre), a bust by the same sculptor on the tomb at Père-Lachaise, frontispieces by Hédouin and Bertil to editions of his works, a sketch by Meissonier covered by a subsequent work, and a daguerreotype destroyed by the Prussians at Saint Cloud in 1871, would sum up, according to M. Tourneaux, all the evidence of importance in this matter. There is, however, a description of Balzac by Lamartine: "*C'était*," he said, "*la figure d'un élément, grosse tête, chevaux épars sur son collet et ses joues comme une crinière que le ciseau n'émondait jamais, très obtus, œil de flamme, corps colossal ; il était gros,*

Musée Rodin

BALZAC

(*Marble*)

épais, carré par la base et les épaules : le corps, les cuisses, les membres puissants ; beaucoup de l'ampleur de Mirabeau, mais nulle lourdeur ; il y avait tant d'âme qu'elle portait cela légèrement, gaiment, comme une enveloppe souple et nullement comme un fardeau ; ce poids semblait lui donner de la force et non lui en retirer . . . Ses bras courtes gesticulaient avec aisance ; il causait comme un orateur parlé. . . . Les chevaux flottaient sur ce front en grandes boucles. Les ioues étaient pleines." *

Here, then, was the ground-work on which Rodin had to build his figure. But this was not all. There was the *Comédie Humaine*, the expression of Balzac's genius in literature. It would, however, provide a hazardous element in the portraiture of human greatness if it might be premised that the qualities of the mind indicated the shape of a nose, the curl of a lip, or the angle of a moustache. But, as we have seen, there was sufficient authentic matter for Rodin to work upon.

The statue was commissioned by the *Société des Gens de Lettres* which, in the first instance (in 1893), had sought the services of Chapu. But Chapu died before his work was finished, and, through the

* Lamartine : *Balzac et ses œuvres*, pp. 16, 17.

influence of Zola, who was the President of the Society, it came eventually into the hands of Rodin. He was engaged upon the work for some five years. He read the *Comédie Humaine;* he visited Tours where Balzac was born ; he studied the types of the country. He modelled the head of a man, who was said to resemble Balzac. He modelled a head of Balzac as a young man ; and he modelled his subject in the nude. Meanwhile the statue was not forthcoming up to contract time, and the Société became impatient. When, finally, the statue was before them, they declared that they did not recognise Balzac in the *ébauche* of M. Rodin. They backed up an opinion, which was no doubt a perfectly honest opinion, by the questionable proceeding of cancelling the contract.

Public and critical opinion supported the view of the Society, when the Balzac was exhibited at the Salon of 1898. "*Enfin Rodin s'est trompé*"—said the critics. "*C'est un bonhomme de neige*"—"*C'est Balzac qui est sorti de son lit pour recevoir un créancier.*"—"*Il n'a pas d'yeux*"—said the public.* The hostility and ridicule, the action of the *Société des Gens de Lettres* in breaking the contract, provoked, on the other

* Alexandre, *Balzac*, p. 18.

hand, plenty of sympathy. A rich manufacturer offered to buy the statue ; committees were formed in Brussels and Paris for the same purpose ; but at the close of the Salon the *Balzac* found its way back to Rodin's studio.

So far as the *Société des Gens de Lettres* was concerned there were obviously two courses open to Rodin ; to enforce his legal rights, or to let the matter for the moment rest. A triumphant law case could have brought him no consolation ; and to pocket the money of a dissatisfied client would not be likely to commend itself to an artist or Rodin's stamp. In such matters legal claims are only enforced when other claims to consideration are of small importance. So incomprehensible did the figure appear to the Society, in fact, that they may have had an uneasy suspicion that it was a little experimental humour on Rodin's part. And even a *Society of Men of Letters* may not care to be fooled. It is possible that, in the frank disavowal of their legal obligations with regard to a work which they neither understood nor liked, the Society's attitude compared favourably with the attitude of those, on the other side, who instantly discovered in the Balzac a masterpiece, and who might, one

feels, have found the same qualities in inferior work of an unfamiliar kind. There exists a nebulous kind of impressionism always ready to take shape at any erratic manifestation in art or letters. In the case of the *Balzac*, Rodin's previous work entitled him, at least, to an effort of patient, respectful, and serious comprehension. It was as absurd to praise lightly as it was to dismiss lightly a work which had engaged the hands and brain of a man of genius for five years. Since its exhibition at the New Salon in 1898 the *Balzac* has been familiar to those who care for sculpture, and still opinion is pretty much at issue. But the statue is silently fighting its way; opinion is coming over to its side. Within a short space, we may find that it has been taken over by the *Conseil municipal* of Paris, and placed in a position worthy alike of Balzac and Rodin.

The view that the statue is merely a representation of the author of the *Comédie Humaine*, and not precisely of the man, is scarcely borne out by the facts. The elaborate and detailed studies which preceded its creation go to show that it is an attempt at an exact realisation of the man as he lived and worked. It corresponds, for instance, with Lamartine's description; but it is not Balzac as he appears to his

friends, not quite even as he appeared to Lamartine. It is Balzac in one of his prolonged intervals of self-absorption, in retirement, as "the secretary of society," clothed in the garment which has caused so much amusement, but which is nevertheless documentary. "*On le trouvait toujours chez lui vêtu d'une large robe de chambre de cachemire blanc doublée de soie blanche, taillée comme celle d'une moine.*"*

It is interesting to compare the head with the bust of Balzac as a young man. The resemblance between the two faces is precise; but in the older face there is amplification of scale, amplification of feature and expression. It is not, as in the first instance, a young man looking out on the world, but the author of the *Comédie Humaine;* it is an interpretation of an exalted and ironical mind, by an art which comprehends the exaltation and the irony. One cannot look upon the face of a man of great achievements, and dissociate its character from the achievements. Rodin has portrayed his *Balzac* as he has seen him; and as probably the rest of the world will in the course of time come to see him.

* Lamartine, *Balzac.*

VIII

THERE are other phases of Rodin's art which can only be casually referred to in this little book. There are, for instance, his drypoints, distinctive and charming as in "The Spring." There are his wash drawings, studies of the model, which perhaps scarcely exist as independent works of art; there are his preliminary sketches for the Gate of Hell (these have been published in portfolio), derived from the Inferno of Dante, possessing much of the mystical quality, both in sentiment and form, of William Blake. And, finally, there are his sketches in line from the model (see p. 67), which are a sort of short-hand notes, drawn on a system peculiar to Rodin himself. Keeping his attention fixed on the model, his pencil alone follows the lines on the paper, with at times very incongruous effect.

The personal note which is manifest in Rodin's

en Dympathie a ce moment en
Randolphe Dirette

A Bodin

direct representation of Nature, is not less manifest in his work of a purely symbolic type. Symbolism in literature, in prose literature, at any rate, is largely the expression of ideas which with more deliberate thought might as well be expressed in a direct manner. But in forms of art of more definite limitations, as in sculpture, there are ideas which can be suggested only by symbols. The vocabulary of symbolism in sculpture has not been very extensive and is familiar to every one: the representations of Truth, and Hope, and Virtue, and the rest have become largely a convention; and every exhibition of sculpture possesses variations on the themes of Spring and Autumn, of a range of subjects which have become more or less stereotyped. Rodin has gone farther afield; or, rather, he has been content with the creations of his own fantasy, and has given expression to ideas in sculpture which hitherto have been more common to poetry. Of such are *Une esquisse d'un rêve; une ombre vient parler à une femme désolée*, *Les nuages*, *Le crépuscule descendant dans la nuit*, *La parque et la jeune fille*, *Amor fugit*, *Désespoir*, and many others.

There is also his *Monument du Travail*, a tower containing on its interior walls reliefs of masons,

carpenters, joiners, and various types of workers. The entrance to the spiral way, from which the sculptures may be seen, is guarded by two figures, symbols of Day and Night; and on the summit of the tower are *Les Bénédictions*, a group which Rodin has just completed, and which gives unity and a poetic value to the whole conception. Another monument of a very different kind, "destinée à evoquer le souvenir d'une femme," with its fan, its roses, with its symbols of music, youth, and other fancies, as charming as a cavalier lyric, indicates, taken with his other work, a catholicity of vision sufficiently rare in any art.

. . . . .

Since this essay was projected, various circumstances have contributed to make Rodin a popular figure in the artistic life of this country. When, in the winter of last year, a group of English members of Parliament accepted an invitation to Paris from their political *confrères* of France, Rodin's studio was included among their places of pilgrimage. A few weeks later, Rodin was offered, and accepted, the Presidentship, in succession to Mr. Whistler, of the International Society of Artists, which, at the moment of writing, is holding at the

New Gallery its fourth exhibition. Rodin was present at the opening ceremony, and during his short stay in London he was received by the King. In view of the general apathy hitherto prevailing in regard to the art of sculpture, these events are of some importance. It suggests not the revival of interest, but the awakening of interest in an art which has scarcely been sufficiently appreciated in this country. Art may at times find esoteric and individual expression apart from the spirit of contemporary life. But its vitality is sapped, its progress is delayed if there is not a responsive public. We have had an Alfred Stevens; we still have an Alfred Gilbert and other sculptors of fine achievement, as well as many younger men of promise. It may be thought that the revival of interest in architecture and the applied arts, which has been one of the most serious manifestations of the artistic spirit in recent years, has prepared the way for the appreciation and adequate cultivation of the art of sculpture.

POLYPHEMUS

LIST OF M. RODIN'S PRINCIPAL WORKS

1864. L'Homme au nez cassé. *Bust, bronze* (Salon, 1878).
1875. Portrait of M. B——. *Bust, marble.*
Portrait of Garnier. *Bust, terra-cotta.*
1877. L'Age d'Airain. (Salon, 1877.) Paris: Luxembourg.
1878. St. John the Baptist. (Salon, 1880.) Paris: Luxembourg.
1881. Ève. *Bronze.*
1882. Bust of Legros. *Bronze* (Salon, 1883).
Bust of Henley. *Bronze.*
1883. La Bellone. *Bust, bronze.*
General Lynch. *Equestrian statue.*
Le Génie de la Guerre. Paris: Collection Pontremoli.
1885. Bust of Dalon.
Bust of Victor Hugo. Paris: Hôtel de Ville.
1886–1890. Le Baiser. *Small group.*
Bust of Jean Paul Laurens. *Bronze.* Paris: Luxembourg.
La Danaïde. *Marble.* Paris: Luxembourg.
Statue of Bastien Lepage. Damvilliers.
L'Eternelle Idole.
La Misère ou la Fatigue Paris: Collection Vever.
Bust of Octave Mirbeau. *Marble* (New Salon, 1895).
La Pensée. *Marble.* Paris: Luxembourg.
La vieille Heaulmière. *Bronze.* Paris: Luxembourg.

Le Baiser. *Marble.* Paris: Luxembourg.
Le Frère et la Sœur. *Bronze.*
1891. La jeune Mère.
1892. Bust of Puvis de Chavannes. *Plaster* (New Salon, 1892).
Bust of Henri Rochefort.
The Monument of Claude Gellée. Nancy.
L'Éternel Printemps.
Orphée et Eurydice. *Marble.* Yerkes Collection.
La Voix intérieure. Stockholm.
1895. Les Bourgeois de Calais. Calais.
L'Illusion, Fille d'Icare. *Bronze* (New Salon, 1896).
L'Enfant Prodigue.
1896. Minerve.
Le Poète et la vie contemplative. For M. Fenaille.
1897. Monument of Victor Hugo (incomplete). (New Salon, 1897).
Monument of President Sarmiento. Argentine Republic.
1898–1904. Statue of Balzac. *Plaster* (New Salon, 1898).
Le Monument du Travail.
Les Bénédictions.
Le Groupe du Crépuscule.
La Parque et la jeune Fille.
Bust of Falguière.
Les Nuages.
Les Trois Ombres.
1882–1904. La Porte de L'Enfer.

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